

CoE put its reputation before child protection, abuse inquiry finds

Posted: Tue, 6th Oct 2020

The Church of England failed to take action to deal with child abuse as it prioritised the defence of its reputation, an inquiry has found.

In a [report outlining its findings on the Anglican Church](#), released today, the Independent Inquiry on Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) said the C of E's culture enabled child abusers to "hide".

The report said "deference to the church's authority and to individual priests" presented a barrier to the disclosure of abuse, which many victims couldn't overcome.

It highlighted other barriers including "taboos surrounding discussion of sexuality" and "an environment where alleged perpetrators were treated more supportively than victims".

The report said:

- The church has failed to respond consistently to victims and survivors of child sexual abuse "with sympathy and compassion, accompanied by practical and appropriate support".
- The church's neglect of children and young people's wellbeing in favour of protecting its reputation was "in conflict with its mission of love and care for the innocent and the vulnerable".
- A culture of clericalism in the church meant "the moral authority of clergy was widely perceived as beyond reproach".

The report highlighted examples of the mishandling of abuse allegations, one of which was the case of youth worker Timothy Storey. Storey was allowed to continue working with children after expressing "remorse for everything he had done wrong".

He is currently serving 15 years in prison for several offences against children, including rape.

The report's recommendations included that responsibility for safeguarding should be taken away from diocesan bishops and given to safeguarding officers employed by the church's central hierarchy.

Issues for future consideration

The report said the inquiry would return to issues including the mandatory reporting of abuse and the seal of the confessional in due course.

The National Secular Society argues for a law mandating the reporting of abuse allegations, without exemptions for religious institutions, including when abuse is [revealed in the confessional](#).

Response

NSS chief executive Stephen Evans said the findings "demonstrate why religious institutions need to be properly and independently regulated without special treatment or

undue deference".

"In its willingness to neglect the wellbeing of children in favour of protecting its own reputation, the Anglican Church's actions have facilitated the continuance of abuse, perpetrators being shielded from justice and vulnerable victims either foregoing compensation or having to go to enormous lengths to secure it.

"The hollowness of claims that the Church of England provides our country's moral leadership has again been laid bare. Its status as the established church should be re-examined."

Richard Scorer, a solicitor acting for 20 survivors of abuse in the C of E who is also an NSS vice-president, told [The Guardian](#) the report was "very damning".

"It confirms that despite decades of scandal, and endless promises, the C of E continues to fail victims and survivors. Bishops have too much power and too little accountability. National policies are not properly enforced. Sexual offending by clergy continues to be minimised.

"It's clear from the report that huge change is still required, including proper support for survivors and removing bishops' operational responsibility for safeguarding. To make change happen, we also need mandatory reporting and independent oversight of church safeguarding. It is imperative that IICSA recommends these in its final report next year."

The inquiry's hearings

IICSA held public hearings into safeguarding in the C of E in [July 2019](#).

The previous year it also held hearings into the church's handling of abuse [allegations in the diocese of Chichester](#) and [allegations against the abusive bishop Peter Ball](#) as case studies.

Read more on today's report: [Church of England failures 'allowed child sexual abusers to hide'](#), from the BBC.

Image by [Myriam Zilles](#) from [Pixabay](#).

While you're here

Our news and opinion content is an important part of our campaigns work. Many articles involve a lot of research by our campaigns team. If you value this output, please consider supporting us today.

- [Support us from just £1 a month](#)

- [Share on What's App](#)
- [Share on Facebook](#)
- [Share on Twitter](#)
- [Share on Email](#)
- [Subscribe to RSS Feed](#)

Tags: [Abuse](#), [Disestablishment](#)

Related Campaigns

-

[End abuse in religious settings](#)

Religious privilege must not undermine safeguarding and justice.

[Read More](#)

-

[Disestablish the Church of England](#)

A state religion has no place in a 21st century democracy.

[Read More](#)

Related Articles

[Report: CofE safeguarding “below standards” of secular institutions](#)

Most victims and survivors unsatisfied with safeguarding approaches, while safeguarding 'weaponised' to remove those "seen as a nuisance", report finds. [Read More »](#)

[Review: CofE leaders mainly to blame for sacking safeguarding body](#)

"Extreme time pressure" imposed chiefly by archbishop of Canterbury caused "serious design flaws" in safeguarding board, review finds [Read More »](#)

[CofE fails to back reporting of sex abuse disclosures in confession](#)

Church admits confession is "a safe space" for child sexual abusers [Read More »](#)

The Church of England is legitimising spiritual abuse

The Exorcist director William Friedkin [died](#) at the age of 87 this week. His seminal film immortalised the concept... [Read More »](#)

NSS urges Charity Commission to investigate CofE safeguarding

NSS letter comes amid mounting criticism of the decision to sack the Independent Safeguarding Board [Read More »](#)